

Columbian Lodge No. 90

The Italian Lodge in Brookside

by Sue Cochran

Although the population of Brookside held a true melting pot of ethnicities over the years, the Italians do win the prize for being the most numerous for the longest time. The little burg of Brookside had so many Italians, as a matter of fact, that they had their very own Italian Lodge.

Arleen DiOrio, Secretary of the group, put together a history of the group in 1984, which has been extremely helpful in writing this article.

The Columbian Federation is the oldest Italian-American fraternal group in this country, having been organized in 1893 in Chicago, Illinois. It eventually grew to include local chapters across America. "Composed of sincere lovers of the democratic way of life, the Columbian Federation reveals the real feeling of American-Italians who take pride in America", Arleen's history tells us.

Brookside's Lodge for men was organized in April 1900 and officially named the Societa Di Mutuo Soccorso Principe Tommaso Duca Di Genova Loggia No. 90. The women's lodge was founded in June 1914 and called Societa Di M.S. Principessa Maria Isabella Duchessa Di Genova Loggia No. 6. The long Italian name was Americanized in 1963 to Columbian Lodge No. 90, and in 1969, the mens' and womens' groups joined to form one big lodge with a membership averaging about 180 members.

Fraternal organizations of this type were an important social asset to the members and their families. Meetings and club activities brought the people together and made for an even more tightly-knit community than they might have had in a little town like Brookside.

But there was another important function of groups like this, as well. There was no Workman's Compensation program back then, and if someone was hurt or killed in the coal mines, it was very rarely found to be the company's responsibility. That was just a fact of life. Mining was a dangerous occupation, and if you got hurt, it was your fault and it was your problem.

Groups like the Columbian Lodge served as a self-insurance organization in case of injury or death. Everybody paid their dues into the kitty, and everybody knew that if you were the unfortunate one who got injured or killed, your family would receive a little help with their expenses. Amounts were extremely modest by today's standards, but the knowledge that there would be any help at all relieved concerns of the men who spent their lives working the area's coal mines.

Today, we call it Workers Compensation, and both men and women are covered, but back then, even when such programs did start to appear in America, they were for the men: Workman's Compensation.

Charter members of Brookside's Italian Lodge in April of 1900 as listed by Arleen DiOrio included members from the following Italian families: Andretta, Borelli, Del Pizzo, Madonna, Moschetti, Ricchiuti, Santarelli, and Vezzetti.

I was surprised at how short the list of charter members was, but we need to remember that many Italian families were just then arriving from Italy. Immigration statistics show that 1907 was the peak year for Italian immigration into America, with almost 300,000 new arrivals in that one year alone. Compare that to the period from 1820 to 1860 when less than 25,000 Italian immigrants were counted coming into America. Total! (Statistics from the *American Voices Series: Italian Americans*, by Michael Witkoski, c1991.)

But let's get back to our local Columbian Lodge:

Lodge records list these officers in 1910:

Grand President:	Antonio Moschetti
President	Guiseppi Vezzetti
Recording Secretary	Frank Tisone
Vice Secretary	Guiseppi Volpe
Treasurer	Enrico Moschetti
Marshall	Giovanni Di Vitis
Collectors	Tosetti and Borelli
Secretary of Finance	Raffaele Madonna

In 1911, the Italian Lodge purchased the old company store at the corner of Brookside and Colarelli from the Cherokee & Pittsburg Coal and Mining Company for \$175.00, according to DiOrio. In 1949 they sold the building to the Roman Catholic Congregation of St. Michael, Canon City, Colorado for \$1.00. Then in 1970, St. Michael's sold it back to Columbian Lodge No. 90.

Besides its early life as the Company Store, offering everything a miner and his family might need, from groceries to clothing to mining supplies, the old building also held a doctor's office. During its time as the Lodge Hall, the meetings and social events of the community were held there. Brookside & Brewster School District #14 used the building for Christmas programs, school plays, and annual graduation ceremonies. When owned by the church, the women of St. Anthony's Alter and Rosary made spaghetti dinners to earn money for the church. Then the building did a stint as Brookside's Town Hall. Meetings, elections, and community activities were held there. Today the old Italian Lodge is a private residence and art studio.

A newspaper clipping from 1986 tells us that the Columbian Lodge was alive and well at that time and celebrating 86 years as an organization. The special dinner meeting was held at Sali's Paradise on the top of 9th Street Hill. (It's a pawn shop today.) President Charles Salardino presided over the meeting with assistance from additional 1986 lodge officers Frank Cornella, Anthony Colarelli, Arleen DiOrio, Louis DiOrio, Pearl Myers, Eugene Roeder, and Anthony Beltramo. National Secretary-Treasurer Pete Santarelli of Pueblo was a special guest.

In the Canon City area today, the recently-organized Sons of Italy chapter has a large active membership that can still serve up a mean spaghetti dinner when a fund raiser is needed to replenish their coffers. They have been especially helpful with making scholarships available to students of Italian heritage.